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AMELIA SOMERS,

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THE ORPHAN:

OR, THE

BURIED ALIVE!

BY J. K. INGRAM.



BOSTON.

WRIGHT'S STEAM PRESS.

1840.



AMELIA'S ESCAPE FROM THE TOMB.

page 18.

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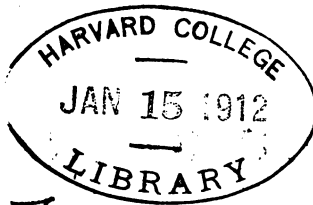
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AMELIA SOMERS, THE ORPHAN: OR, THE BURIED ALIVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-BED—THE ORPHAN—THE CONSPIRACY—THE
ATTEMPTED MURDER.

"CALL my brother to my bedside," said the dying man.

And Richard Somers approached.

"Brother!" he continued, in the solemn and impressive voice of one in the full consciousness of approaching death, "I am about to be called from the world of time into the world of eternity. At such a season it is meet that I should bestow a thought on those I shall leave behind me. I believe, however much you may err in the value you attach to this earth's dross, that the best feelings of fraternal kindness still beat in your bosom; and to your care I commit one of the best of wives, and one of the loveliest of daughters. And if ever that weeping blossom—my AMELIA—becomes an orphan, I have, in my will, made you her guardian and protector; and I charge you not to betray the trust! Do you promise?"

"I do!" responded that stern-hearted brother; but to retain his composure was too much of an effort—he felt a choking sensation rising in his throat, and he turned aside to brush away a tear!

There was no sound to disturb the dread stillness of the chamber of death, save the audible grief-laden sighs of surrounding relatives and friends. But again spake the dying man.

"My Alice—my wife—let me press your hand—do not weep—we have spent many happy years together in our earthly pilgrimage—but we shall meet again, I trust, in the house not made with hands. Be of good cheer!"

There was no response—but the tears of a fond and devoted wife speak with an eloquence which words can never embody.

"Amelia, my child!" he continued, as the last sands of life were running out, "let not your grief for my departure press so heavily upon you; you will not be left alone and defenceless; He who shapeth the wind to the shorn lamb, will not let a hair of your head be injured. Re—receive a father's dying blessing!"

And the spirit took its flight! And the widow and the FATHERLESS knelt beside the bed of death, in the paroxysm of grief and despair!

Three months have passed. Long and weary watching, and a sorrow that could not be comforted, have done their work on a frail and shattered frame, and the widow has followed her departed husband to the grave—and their bones repose side by side in the old family tomb. The ORPHAN is in her guardian and

uncle's house. But the mind of that uncle is set on a black and horrible deed. We must trace him.

It is a dark and stormy night—and Richard Somers is shaping his course through the narrow and unfrequented streets of our great city of New York. At length he finds himself in Walker street, and stops before a dark-colored building, whose time-worn walls speak of former years. It was styled a "public house." "This must be the place," he said to himself, and entered.

"Is Dr. Stiles here?" he inquired.

"Yes; show the gentleman up to the doctor's room," said the man behind the bar to a boy in attendance.

"Ah, is that you?" exclaimed the doctor, when his door opened.

"Yes," replied Richard Somers, as the doctor closed and locked the door; "I have come to speak with you about that business I mentioned."

"Well, I am ready for you."

"To business, then. I have a girl in my house who is in want of medical attendance. I want you to come and reside with me as my family physician. I think I *know enough of you* to enable me to trust you?"

"You can, to the extent of that knowledge," replied his companion, with a mysterious shrug.

"Well, this girl must be doctored—but she must never get well—you understand? Now name your fee."

"This being a delicate case, the charge must be a little extra. Say five thousand."

"Oh, Doctor—that is out of all conscience!"

"So must any fee be! But you must not object to

the amount—the difference between curing of disease, and curing of life, you know, is very great.”

After some further bantering, they came to terms. And Richard executed an agreement stipulating the payment of three thousand dollars when the bloody bargain was fulfilled. And the conspirators separated.

Oh, the lust of gain!—through all ages it has been the besetting sin of mankind. To satisfy the passion for acquiring gold, men have sacrificed honor, stifled conscience, and plunged into the depths of crime. Richard Somers was of this stamp. Not so his brother.

These men had pursued different careers. John Somers had been an honest and contented merchant, and had slowly accumulated a vast fortune—Richard had become a stock-jobbing speculator, and after struggling hard to get rich for a long course of years, and just as he thought that an immense wealth was within his grasp, he lost all. But his reverse of fortune only served to make him more unscrupulous and reckless—and still more daringly bent on his purpose. And we now find the childless money-getter,—his brother scarcely cold in his tomb, his innocent orphan-ward just placed under his charge,—plotting one of the most fiendish deeds ever known in the annals of crime—all for the sake of a filthy and despicable lucre.

Although the father of Amelia had become a man of immense wealth, yet had he not fallen into the follies of fashion, nor plunged into the giddy routine of frivolities which generally distinguish high life. His daughter had therefore been preserved from the unworthy influences by which girls in her station in society are too often surrounded. She had been reared

under the watchful care of one of the best of mothers—and never had an opportunity of contracting the injurious habits, and forming the vitiating tastes, which are so sure to spoil the best of hearts. When she was called to bear the loss of the parents whom she loved, she was at that tender age when the keen emotions of sorrow which is awakened were too violent to endure—her mind soon recovered its elasticity, and that sorrow settled into a quiet feeling, which cast a tinge of melancholy over her thoughts, adding a sweeter charm to her modest and virgin graces. And now, at the age of fourteen, she was not more distinguished for the surpassing loveliness of innocent girlhood, than for that pure and natural simplicity of heart, which evinces blissful ignorance of the unfeeling manners of a cold and heartless world.

Amelia Somers was an orphan and an heiress. And though she could not help comprehending something of the unprotected condition of the one, in the guileless innocence of her young heart, she never suspected the untold dangers to which the other exposed her. In the fancied security of her uncle's protection, she had no foreboding of approaching sorrow; and she began to indulge those bright visions of future happiness, which the angel of hope throws over the imagination of young and ardent youth. Alas! that such dreams should be so cruelly, fatally destroyed!

To her unsuspecting glance, every thing wore the mantle of kindness, and she fondly thought that her days would glide peacefully away. Her uncle appeared assiduous, and his wife attentive. And even Dr. Stiles seemed to make it a point to win her best

esteem. Thus things went on for some time, until, one day, the picture became entirely changed.

Coming hastily, but noiselessly, down stairs, she suddenly caught the sound of her uncle's voice on the lower landing, and paused. Unobserved, she listened; but the sound had died into a whisper. Strange and unaccountable, it seemed to her, that her uncle and Dr. Stiles should be conferring together thus mysteriously. Conceiving, however, that it was a matter in which she had no right to be concerned, she was about to pass on, when their words again became audible;—and the blood congealed around her heart, her limbs stiffened, and she had well nigh fainted, when her ear caught the words, "I tell you, the girl must die—for her property shall be mine!" uttered by her uncle in a half-angry tone, just as he opened the door and went out.

She had strength enough to crawl to her chamber, and throw herself on her bed in the misery of despair. Hers was indeed a critical and distressing situation. When her agitation had subsided sufficiently to allow her the power of thought, she reflected on the import of the terrible words she had heard. At whom they were pointed, she could hardly be at a loss to imagine. For the first time, the prospect of an early death sprang up like a spectre before her startled imagination. And if at times, with the buoyant hopes of youth, she gathered encouragement, from the uniform kindness shown her on all occasions, of the mysterious designs of her uncle, and felt half persuaded that she was not his intended victim,—still would the recurring recollection of those emphatic words—"the girl must die!"—dash to the earth those half-awakened hopes, and chill the warm

current of her veins with the too palpable meaning they conveyed.

The desire of life is an instinct of our common nature—and in all ages of our mortal existence, this feeling reigns in the human breast. But at no time does life appear so sweet, as it does to the young heart. Amelia, ignorant as she was of all the motives of vice, could not but know that—if her uncle had plotted her murder—it was for the purpose of grasping her property; and she would have thrown herself upon her knees before him, and bid him take it all, but spare her, had she not perceived that betraying such a knowledge of his fell purpose would only have hurried him onward to its accomplishment.

And here this sweet-tempered girl, born and reared among all the circumstances which can make life dear—left, by a loss which to all must come sooner or later, the heiress of an immense fortune, and with the brightest prospects of a life of happiness spread out before her—was compelled to wear away her once sweet existence in the very shadow of death. When she arose in the morning from her disturbed slumbers, she knew not but that day was to be her last—when she betook herself to her bed at night, it was in the terror of falling an innocent victim to the dagger of a midnight assassin. No wonder that her lip lost its rosy freshness, and her cheek became blanched and pale; and that she appeared to be suffering under some secret and rankling disease.

The conspirators could hardly imagine the cause of this sudden alteration in the health and appearance of their victim; but referring it to some natural cause, they

took advantage of it as the best time for commencing their horrible work. But that work must be accomplished cautiously and gradually. Suspicion would have been too alarmingly awakened if she had been made to drop suddenly away.

Amelia could interpose no reasonable objection to receiving medical aid, and she took the medicine prescribed by Dr. Stiles, though with the secret certainty that it would bring no relief. And so it was. The weakening effects of the potion were too soon experienced. Alas! the agony of mind increased with far greater rapidity than the anguish of bodily pain. She felt that she was marked for the grave!

Yet her torn and lacerated heart would gladly have sought peace and shelter elsewhere, but she could not fly from her prison-house. She was now told that her disease made her close confinement to her chamber imperative. And whenever she was left alone, the door was firmly locked. And if any of her father's or mother's friends happened to call, the presence of her aunt during their stay made it impossible for her to reveal to them the perilous situation in which she was placed.

But she declined so rapidly, that her uncle even feared to have her seen. And Dr. Stiles gave out word that nobody could be admitted to her chamber, except such attendance as he deemed necessary. The orphan could doubt no longer; she saw she was hurrying to the tomb. The conviction became fixed and unalterable,—that she was to be murdered! But she determined to make one effort to escape the deadly snare. She succeeded, while left alone, in writing a letter to one of her mother's friends, disclosing the secret of her

intended assassination, and imploring to be rescued from the horrid fate. This she entrusted to a servant in whom she too fondly, and, alas! too fatally, thought she could confide. But he betrayed his trust, and placed the letter in the hands of her uncle. Richard Somers tore it open, read it with no little alarm, and determined to delay no longer. From that moment her fate was irrevocably sealed.

Dr. Stiles prepared the final drug. He offered it to her, but she refused to take it. Sick, reduced, and faint, she told him she preferred to die as she was, rather than be hurried to her grave by his poisonous medicine, the ill-effects of which she had already experienced. Affecting to be highly offended, he left the room; telling her that she might die now, though he had done all in his power to save her.

But the danger of threatened exposure admitted of no delay; some means must be found to silence her forever. Richard Somers compelled his wife to undertake the task of inducing the orphan to swallow the poisonous drug. The next day she entered the room and told her she had brought a medicine which a particular medical friend of hers had suggested, as certain to effect a speedy cure of the painful disease. But it required all her entreaties to make the orphan believe the fatal deceit. Constrained more by the kindness and apparent sincerity of her tone and manner, than by all the arguments she had employed, she at last yielded to her importunity.

She took the tumbler, and drank the draught. In an instant she felt a wild thrill bounding through her veins, and tingling the very ends of her fingers! At

once the horrible thought flashed upon her mind—she was *poisoned*! “I am murdered!” she shrieked, in the heart-rending tones of hopeless despair. She cast her wild and agonizing gaze around the room, for aid, but her aunt had gone. No living soul was there to hear her cry. She knew that she was left alone to die! she felt the insidious drug creeping back to her heart, and seize upon the vital spark of life! There was no relief; no hope! She must resign life and all its glorious anticipations;—in the morning of hope, she must be cut off—by the blackest deed that was ever conceived in the depths of the bottomless pit—and go down to the dark grave! But as the lamp of life flickered in its socket, she felt a purer rapture beam in upon her mind, than had ever been revealed to her mortal vision. Her moans ceased. The forms of her departed parents appeared to her in all the affectionate attitude of filial love. Strong in conscious innocence and virtue, she felt that she was about to join them in a happier world. She wept no more!

When Mrs. Somers returned to the room, all was still and silent as the grave. The orphan had sunk into that slumber from which, as she thought, there would be no earthly waking. Insensibility had thrown its mantle over her.

Then it was spread abroad that she had died of rapid consumption, the seeds of which she had inherited from her birth. The sudden decline and death of her mother gave credence to the black-hearted tale; and credulous friends believed. And there was a splendid funeral—pomp and magnificence lent their meretri-

cious charms to deck the pall of the departed one. And her lovely form was consigned to the tomb where the last remains of her parents reposed.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORPHAN'S RESUSCITATION AND MIRACULOUS ESCAPE— HER ADVENTURES—AN INCIDENT.

RICHARD SOMERS had achieved the great work of his life; he had become a man of immense wealth. He had waded through innocent blood to fortune; yet, in this hour of exultation he could not stifle those pangs of conscience which were afterwards destined to drive him to despair. He had attained the end; yet he could not, for a moment, lose sight of the horror of the means. But he could now lift his head proudly in the monied world, and assume a high position in the fashionable community. He had arranged every thing with a masterly hand. He paid the pretended Dr. Stiles the price of blood, and he went his way. He felt safe and secure from exposure—and exulted, in the extravagance of his joy, over his glorious prospects. For the present, we leave him there.

The orphan, he thought, had died from the effects of the subtle poison. But though aided by the feebleness of her shattered frame, he knew not that it had not done half its work. With the characteristic impatience of avarice, she had been hastened to her final resting-

place—the tomb. Into the darkness of that tomb let us now descend.

Amelia awoke—awoke from the brief trance into which she had been thrown by that sense-stealing drug—awoke to find herself in the narrow confines of a coffin. At first it seemed to her as if she was reviving from a terrible dream—but in a moment her memory recalled the whole transaction. What time she had lain there she could not tell—but she felt that it was not long. There she lay, as calmly as though in her own bed, and revolved in her mind the entire range of circumstances which had brought her there. At last she determined to make another effort for life. She braced herself against the coffin-lid, and struggled with unnatural energy. In the hurry of preparation it had been imperfectly secured, and the lid gave way. She was faint and weak—and the effort had nearly deprived her of life. But her soul revived once more at the prospect of release. It was some time before she could gather strength to creep from her coffin. Even then new obstacles beset her. She had freed herself from the first, it is true; how was she to overcome the second? She groped around in the darkness, and found the door; but the first touch too plainly told there was no yield to that. She sunk down in despair. Was she now, even now, so many sufferings endured, so many dangers passed, at last to perish and decay in her living tomb? The thought was enough to chill every life-drop in her veins.

The varying and eventful scenes of her brief existence passed through her mind. She thought of the bright and happy days of her childhood, when, blessed

with every comfort that can endear life, she had sported away the sunny hours, with no foreboding of approaching misery. She pondered on all the innumerable acts of parental love, she had experienced from a kind father and an affectionate mother. She thought how, even though deprived of them at so early an age, she had been left surrounded by all the circumstances that can command the brightest destiny; and how those very circumstances had made her the object of the most unnatural crime it had ever entered into the heart of wicked man to conceive. And then, to think, that after thus miraculously escaping the effects of the foul arts of her uncle, she was now to lay down her life in that sepulchre of the dead, would have been enough to overthrow the dominion of reason, and make her a raving maniac, had not a flood of tears come to her relief. "Spirits of my departed parents!" she exclaimed, "how must ye weep, even in your blissful abode, if ye behold the agony of your child!"

Nature at last seemed to yield, and again she felt the insidious approaches of the fell destroyer. Her emaciated limbs began to stiffen with the benumbing chillness of that cold, dark place.

But suddenly she hears noises without—she listens with a throbbing heart, and they seem to approach. She hears a distinct clicking at the very door of the tomb. At length words become audible.

"I say, Bill, this ere fits—now we shall make a good haul. The doctor's must pay us well for this night's job."

"Ay, and we'd better not gamble it all away, as we did the last profits of our trade."

"So say I. Now for a good body," said the other, as he opened the door.

"Oh, Tom, that confounded cloak will bother you—throw it off."

And the two grave-riflers entered. Amelia had receded into a corner—she breathed not, but as they proceeded towards the coffin in which she had lain, she crept noiselessly out, threw the cloak over her, and fled away as fast as her weakened limbs and waning strength could carry her. They heard the rustling of the cloak, and fearing an ambushed danger, they fled too, but in a different direction.

Amelia was under the panoply of heaven. It was a dark, dreary night, but a bright star beamed out from the sky, gathering a greater lustre from the surrounding gloom. She hailed it as a bright promise of deliverance, and felt cheered and revived. She had scarcely left the grave-yard, when she spied a light streaming from a low tenement. She summoned courage to knock at the door. The sole occupant of the room which contained the light, was one of that oppressed class,—a seamstress—who was up at that late hour to complete the work which was to furnish her day's pittance for the morrow. This old lady was somewhat frightened at the knocking, but she knew that a person of her humble condition stood in no danger of robbery, and she went to her window, and inquired, "who's there?"

"Can you shelter an orphan in distress?" responded Amelia.

Her door was open in a moment.

"Angel o' mercy!" she exclaimed, as Amelia

entered, and stood before her, the cloak thrown open so as to reveal the grave-clothes she had on—"what can all this mean?"

"Seek not to know now. I am sore and weary; let me but rest on your floor to-night—and tomorrow you shall know all."

She gazed at her for some moments. "You cannot be one of the bad ones, I know," she at length said; "that sweet face of yours tells me so. Yes, child, you shall share my cot to-night."

Amelia awoke in the morning from a deep and quiet slumber—the first she had enjoyed for many a long night. The good old lady was up before her; and was busily engaged in spreading on a pine board her meagre morning repast.

"Ah," said she to herself, "there is no guilt in that heart. A troubled mind would never let her sleep so well."

Amelia arose from her couch, and greeted her kind protectress in the simple accents of her warm gratitude. And there, in that humble dwelling, the widow and the ORPHAN knelt together at the shrine of a common Father, and mingled their sinless offerings of prayer and praise. And if ever the recording angel felt a warmer glow of rapture than is usually vouchsafed to the dwellers around the eternal Throne, it was while inscribing on the leaves of the everlasting book, that pure oblation of pious devotion.

They sat down to the scanty meal; and Amelia related to the kind lady the story of her wrongs, and sufferings, and dangers. She felt that she could repose entire confidence in her without fear. Mrs. Haralson

was much shocked at the recital; but though her sympathies were awakened in the orphan's behalf, she could offer her no advice concerning the means by which she might secure her personal safety, or vindicate her natural rights. "But," said she, "under this roof you shall find a shelter, until Providence points out the way to restore you to your inheritance."

"I know not what I can do against that powerful man," replied Amelia; "but I cannot think of adding another burden to those you now labor under. I must do something for my own support."

But what could the orphan do? The child of affluence, reduced to the child of poverty, what art learned in the lap of the one, could be of service to her in the other. She dared not return to her relations; for she knew not but they were all leagued together to deprive her of her life, for the sake of her property; and therefore she considered it much safer to throw herself on the mercy of strangers. The female heart, soft and retiring, while fanned by the breezes of prosperity, becomes strong and elastic in the rough blast of adversity. The nature of the lovely girl rose with the sternness of the occasion; and her bosom thrilled with a high resolution. She would cast off, for a time, the habiliments of her sex, and disguise herself in those of the other—and go forth to seek the means of life.

It was a long time before the widow could be brought to acquiesce in this arrangement; she reminded her of the dangers she would incur—she told her of the insults she might receive—and of her utterly helpless situation if her disguise should be penetrated—but in vain. The heart of the girl was inflexibly fixed on its purpose—

and at last the old lady yielded. And then they immediately set about the work of preparation. The clothes worn by Mrs. Haralson's boy, who had died long ago, were taken from the closet where they had been kept as a sacred memorial, and fitted to the form that was now to wear them. The orphan arrayed herself in these garments—submitted, without a tear, to be shorn of her long flowing tresses—and set out on her pilgrimage, to work her way, destitute and forlorn, through a world of foes; innocence, youth, beauty, against avarice, fraud, lust!

Amelia wandered on, and as she left the secluded quarter of the great city from which she had started, and entered the more crowded and busy streets, she cast her eyes anxiously and suspiciously about, to see if she was not the object of unusual scrutiny, or fearful lest she might fall, unwittingly, into the hands of her uncle, or some of his hired agents. But she could catch no suspicious glance, and she felt somewhat relieved. Suddenly she saw a small placard in the window of a periodical office—“*agents wanted* ;” scarcely understanding its meaning, she paused before the door; presently a boy came out with a well-filled basket of magazines and small publications. She ventured to accost him.

“What have you there, my boy?”

“Oh, I’ve auvery thing—does yer want to buy? Here’s magazines, and periodicals of the day; and all them ’ere sort of books.”

“What do you get for selling them?”

“I—I gets what I makes. I say, if yez don’t want to buy, I’ve must *absquat*.”

And away he went. The orphan summoned her resolution, and entered the office.

"I see you want agents here—for what purpose?" she inquired, in her sweet voice.

"Yes, we want agents to sell these books you see arranged along here."

"How do you employ them?"

"Oh, they take these publications at a large discount, and sell them again at a great profit, and then they obtain subscribers for these periodicals. What will you take?"

"Oh, sir, I am a poor orphan, and have no money to begin on. I can't take any."

She turned to leave.

"Stop a moment," said the man, "you look like an honest lad—if you choose to try, you may take a few of these and see what you can do."

Amelia accepted the proposal, and he collected a small parcel. "What shall I call your name?" said he.

The orphan started, but she hesitated only a moment; "Charles Forbes," she replied.

After she left the store, she sought the narrow streets in the lower part of the city, as not being liable to lead to her detection by those whom she most feared. Painful, indeed, to her sensitive heart, was the commencement of her new undertaking. But among the sensations which at first damped her ardor, the dictates of a false pride had no share; she knew that though the work on which she had entered might be humble, yet it was honest; and she felt that, poor and feeble as she was, she could lift her brow to heaven with as proud a consciousness in her integrity of purpose, as

the rich and well-dressed man who at first passed her unnoticed by. She encountered much discouragement; but by dint of untiring and undaunted effort, she managed that day to dispose of her little stock.

At night she wended her way to the widow's home.

"See, my mother, (shall I not call you so?)" said she, "see the result of my first day's effort. Take it all—it is yours." And she threw into the old lady's lap her little earnings.

"God bless you, my child, where did you get this?" and she told her.

"Well," she continued, "Providence helps the helpless. But I cannot touch a farthing of it. Keep it, my dear child, the Lord has given you a talent to improve."

For some time Charles Forbes (let the orphan now be known by the name she assumed,) pursued his labors in the city of New York. By degrees, that which was at first painful, became pleasant and agreeable. He toiled with untiring industry; happy to think that he earned enough to keep him from being a burden to the kind widow. But one day the man by whom he had been employed, suggested that he would do better by traveling into the interior of the State, and obtaining subscribers for some of the popular magazines. The orphan thought it best to advise with her he fondly called his "mother," before hazarding the experiment. The good old lady told him he had better acquiesce in the proposition. She had always feared that some abandoned heart in the city would discover his disguise, and seduce him (or rather *her*) from the paths of virtue; she had never thought of speaking to him on this subject, because she deemed him too young to com-

prehend all the dangers to which he was exposed. But these dangers, she thought would not beset him so much while traveling in the country, as they did in his city life. She spent the whole of that evening in giving the youth all the kind lessons of advice and admonition which her long life had enabled her to gather in its lowly walks.

Nerved by the sympathy and encouragement of the kind-hearted widow, but with many misgivings and forebodings, the youthful adventurer started on his hazardous expedition. But we cannot follow him through all the details of his trials, temptations, and triumphs. He was very generally successful in his efforts, as the lists he was continually transmitting to the city fully testified. But very often he was compelled to experience a cruel rebuff, which threw a chill over his warm and gentle heart. It is strange, and yet, alas ! too true, that there are those in this world who will sneer at the efforts of honest industry, because they may happen to be directed to a pursuit which does not meet their high concurrence ; and others, still more despicable and cowardly, who will bestow contempt on those whom they deem too weak to resent an insult. It was Charles' lot to meet with many such ; and though their harshness often caused a sigh to escape his heaving breast, yet his purer nature soon rose above such blighting influences.

One day he arrived in a small, but thickly settled village, and proceeded to try his success with a small group of loiterers collected about "the store;" he asked one of them if he would like to purchase some books

which he had. The fellow turned as if in a fit of hydrophobia.

"What do you come round here for," said he, in a savage tone, "attempting to swindle honest people out of their money for such trash?"

"I swindle no one," replied Charles, mildly; "I simply ask you a civil question; if you do not want these books, please to say so, and not attempt to frighten or insult me."

"Talk not to me about insult, you saucy imp!" he exclaimed, as Charles turned to the others, who had taken some books to examine—"if you ain't off in two snaps less than no time, I'll kick you and your books into the ditch, for your impudence."

For the first time since he had started, Charles was frightened for his personal safety; but he could not fly, and he stood there, pale and quivering, before that large, stalwart man.

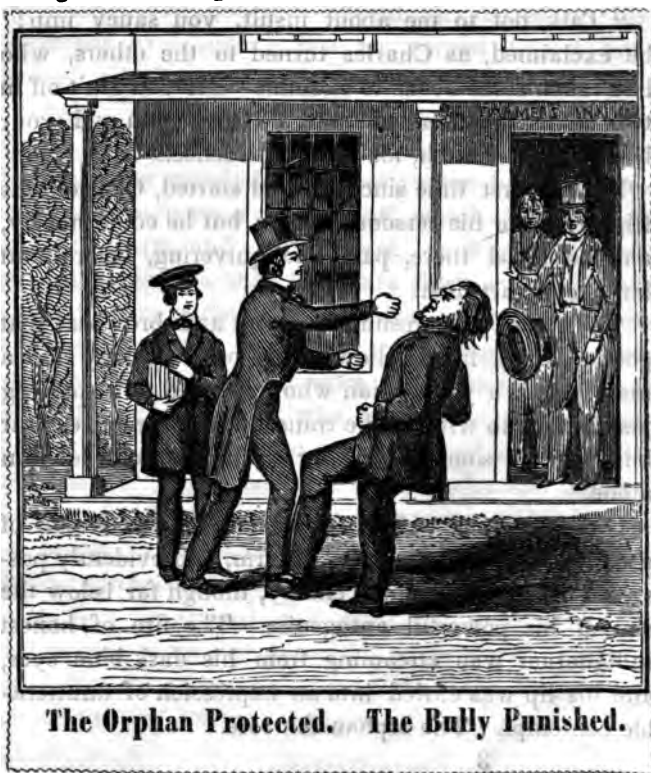
"Why do you presume to insult and browbeat that good-natured little fellow, you poor apology for a man?" said a young man who happened to be passing just in time to witness the transaction; "practice your bullying on some one nearer your size, and let him alone."

Charles turned to look upon him; he was a man of great beauty and symmetry of form, and evidently possessed of great muscular energy, though far below the size of his powerful antagonist. The fire of honest indignation was streaming from his dark-blue eyes, and his lip was curled into an expression of unutterable contempt. The orphan felt safe.

"If you want to take it up, just say so," said the huge man, in a brawling tone.

"I take nothing from a coward," responded the young man, still more contemptuously.

At this the other sprang at him, as if he would annihilate him in an instant; but he coolly stepped back a pace or two, and after parrying for a little time the other's passes, by one well-directed blow, he felled his antagonist to the ground.



Leaving his fallen foe to regain his equilibrium as best he could, the young man beckoned to Charles, and walked away.

"You are a stranger in this place, I see," said he. "Do you follow this business as an avocation?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Charles; "I was suddenly deprived of a kind father and an affectionate mother; and a penniless orphan must be glad to seize upon any means by which he can save himself from the almshouse, or perhaps a worse fate."

"But could not your friends assist you?"

"Alas! I have no *friends*—but one," exclaimed the orphan, and burst into tears.

"Forgive me, my dear boy," said the young man, in a kindness of tone which appealed directly to his heart—"forgive me, if in my ignorance of your history I said aught to awaken grief in your heart."

"You are blameless," he replied, "but if you knew the details of that history, you would see that I had cause enough to weep."

"I doubt it not, my friend," he said; "but come to my father's house; you shall find there a hospitable shelter as long as you remain here."

The kind invitation was gratefully accepted, and the new-made friends walked to the farmer's house.

CHAPTER III.

THE ORPHAN'S FIRST LETTER TO HER UNCLE—HIS REMORSE—THE TWO MURDERS.

Time passed on, and Charles Forbes continued at his avocation. He forgot not the widow Haralson, and

often found means to remit her small amounts of his earnings. These little offerings of gratitude constituted his sweetest pleasures. But through all his wanderings he had still preserved in the silent sanctity of his bosom one secret—the secret of his misfortunes and his sex. From his observation and experience, his mind gathered stores of worldly knowledge, and he began to ripen with a wisdom far above his years. And he felt daily a growing desire to make an effort to vindicate his rights and regain his inheritance. This desire took such strong hold on his heart, that he reflected continually on the means by which he might be enabled to throw off his disguise, and appear before the world under true colors.

After making a large circuit of towns, he found himself, in the course of his travels, back again in that village where an incident had occurred which was forever fixed in his memory. He had formed a friendship there which he could never forget. He sought the farmer's house, and was cordially welcomed back by the farmer's son—who was so warmly enthusiastic at once more seeing Charles, that he could not help clasping him in his friendly embrace. But he knew not what a treasure he had encircled. And while pressed there to his bosom, she whom we have lately known only as Charles Forbes, felt such a rapture of soul—so new to her, and so entrancing—that an involuntary sigh escaped her when he released his grasp. But it was not noticed. He tried to persuade the orphan, but in vain, to relate to him his sad history. Charles begged him not to be offended with him if he declined his request, until he could gratify it with more safety to himself.

While here, the thought all at once occurred to the orphan to write a letter to his defrauding uncle, and see if that would not open a way by which he might be released from the bondage of fear, and restored to the position which belonged to him. But he hardly dared to write under his proper name; and thought it safer to write anonymously. So he penned a letter, carefully worded in this respect, and put it in the mail. Let us leave him for awhile, and follow it to its destination.

Richard Somers was sitting in his room one night, when his servant, just returned from the post-office, handed him a letter. He opened it, and with a fearful and quaking heart, read as follows:—

“R. SOMERS, Esq.—As you dread the ignominy and terrible punishment which would follow the exposure of your secret and fiendish deeds, give heed to what I shall now utter. I know all, and can consign you to the gallows if I but say the word. In the corruption of your heart you offended the majesty of heaven, and committed the most unheard of and unnatural violation of all human ties, in conceiving and plotting the murder of your niece and ward, Amelia Somers. You thought you had succeeded in your foul work, and have grasped its reward—her property. But you were foiled. *She now lives*, and will soon appear to blast you in your guilt. Yet I will not be so merciless to you as you were to her. I give you fair warning, and bid you fly from New York to some far off place, where you can never be discovered, and let your wronged and suffer-

ing niece take peaceable possession of her own. If you hesitate or delay, beware ! A FRIEND."

He had scarcely finished the perusal of this letter, ere his frame shook and his lips quivered, as if he was in a strong convulsion. At first he could scarcely believe what he read. "What!" he muttered between his teeth, "she lives!—what a lie is this. Did I not see her, a year ago, carried to the grave? Pshaw! can such a foolish story disturb *me*?" But it did disturb him—and his very soul writhed under the bitter anguish it awakened.

What an unmerciful thing is a remorseful and indignant conscience! For a whole year the conscience of Richard Somers, seared as it had been before by the burning flame of reckless avarice, had slumbered beneath the glow of present success; but it was now aroused and threatened to overwhelm that wretched man with its tide of bitter recollection. The unspeakable horror of the crime he had perpetrated, (for he still believed he was guilty of it, notwithstanding the contrary assurance in the letter,) appeared to his agonized mind in all its black shape of unalleviated, unmitigated fiendishness.

But after a while, the first terror and alarm began to abate, and he collected his scattered thoughts, and endeavored to comprehend the dangers of his situation. He felt sure the orphan was not alive—and he settled into the conviction that this letter was only a trick. Yet the author of it had possessed himself of the fatal secret—and who could that author be? The *quondam* Dr. Stiles had some months since ended a career of

crime on the gallows, in the city of New Orleans. The only remaining partner to the conspiracy was his wife. But she certainly could have no motive in dictating such a letter as this. Suddenly the thought struck him that she had revealed it to her brother; and as that brother, who had been unfortunate in business, had applied to him a few days previously for pecuniary aid, the thought soon became a conviction that he had written this letter for the purpose of aiding that application. How illogical is the reasoning of a guilty and trembling man; had he but examined the penmanship, he would have discovered a truer explanation of the mystery he sought to penetrate.

His mind was fixed. Starting up, he enveloped himself in his great coat, for it was the dead of winter. "More blood! more blood!" he muttered to himself, as he went out. He proceeded to the house of his brother-in-law.

"Good evening," he said to him, when he came to the door; "it is rather late, but I have some business at the lower end, and I thought I would just call, and if you would take a walk with me, we would talk over that matter you mentioned to me the other day. I have thought better of it."

And his unsuspecting victim sallied forth with him, gladdened with the gleam of the hope that he would be enabled to redeem his credit, and retrieve his fortunes. Richard Somers led him craftily along, until they were in a narrow and dark street in the very Alsatia of the city. "Now's my time," he thought,—he drew a dagger, and plunged it into the heart of the innocent man. He fell, with a single groan—and the fratricide escaped. The next morning the lifeless body was

found lying in its clotted gore. No trace of the murderer could be discovered, and the coroner's inquest was soon despatched. Even his name was not known to those who saw the corpse, and the affair was soon forgotten.

The murderer returned to his house. His wife had retired, and all was still. "I must make sure work!" he said, as he beheld the companion of his life, and the partner in his guilt, repose in peaceful slumber. He took a handkerchief, wound it around her throat, and in a few moments she breathed no more!

"There!" he exclaimed, "no one knows now my deeds, but—but—" he could not finish his sentence. A thought of that Being whose laws he had spurned and violated, could not be harbored. In the morning the inmates of the house were startled to hear that their mistress had died of apoplexy. It seemed strange and wonderful—but no one suspected foul play, and her body was hurried to the grave.

The man of crime stood alone, amid all his wealth. At last, he thought, every thing was safe. But that was a terrible mistake.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ORPHAN'S SECOND LETTER—ITS TERRIBLE EFFECT—HER
UNCLE KILLS HIMSELF—THE ORPHAN ONCE MORE THE HEIR-
ESS—CONCLUSION.

CHARLES FORBES had written to Mrs. Haralson that he had some hopes that his uncle would at last make a voluntary surrender of his ill-gotten property, and desired her to give him any intelligence she might gather

of his movements. After waiting some time, he received her reply, which amounted to stating that nothing of note had happened, except the sudden death of his wife. But the orphan's quick perception soon penetrated the mysterious cause of that event. And he determined to risk his own life rather than be the cause of any more shedding of blood. He therefore wrote the following letter, and anxiously awaited its result.

"MISJUDGING UNCLE :—I wrote you an anonymous letter a short time since, hoping that that might awaken in you a proper sense of your guilt, and induce you to make speedy restoration. But it seems you have mistaken its source, and disregarded its import. You have I fear, committed the very crime you plotted against me, to shield yourself from the consequences of that. But you cannot escape. I tell you again, I was saved from the fate you prepared for me, and am now alive. The poison I received from your wife, (ah ! she has been sent, I cannot doubt, by your blood-reeking hand, to receive the punishment of that deed,) refused to do its office—I was revived in the tomb—I escaped from it—and have been a wanderer ever since—while you, the sole cause of all my dangers and sufferings, have been rioting in the abundance of what was mine by inheritance. But a terrible expiation of your guilt awaits you, here and hereafter ; and I forbear to say more. Under the protection of friends in whom I can trust, I am now on my way to the city, to establish my just claims before the law. .

Your rescued neice, AMELIA SOMERS."

It is related of a celebrated ancient painter, that, in portraying a heart-rending scene of grief, after painting

the sorrow-stricken countenances of the minor characters, he drew a veil over that of the chief sufferer, because he was not capable of giving the lineaments of such exquisite agony of woe. Our own subject presents a similar difficulty.

Richard Somers received that letter—read it—compared it with some of the handwriting of his niece which he possessed—and from that instant he knew that his fate was sealed! Language, expressive as it is, cannot describe the agonies of that guilty man. There he stood, in his solitary chamber,—fixed as a statue,—and every line and feature of his face wrought up into such a tortured, demoniac expression, that he seemed more like a horrent form just risen from that “outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth,” than like a human being. And all this but weakly indicated the terrors of the war within. CONSCIENCE and REMORSE were making dreadful havoc there—and adding still more to the writhings of his countenance. But this is too terrible,—let us draw a veil over it.

The sharp report of a pistol rang through the house—the servants rushed into the room,—and the smoke clearing away, revealed the form of Richard Somers, weltering in his blood! Such was his end,—and such is the penalty of avarice, when avarice leads to crime!

Charles Forbes had thought it best to move about from place to place, lest his uncle should again ensnare him. He had thus traveled some distance from the town where his friend resided. One morning, not long after he had sent his last letter, as he happened to be

looking over a city newspaper, his eye was attracted by the following paragraph :—

“**SUICIDE.** We are pained to announce, that Richard Somers, Esq., a gentleman of great wealth, and high standing in the commercial community, committed suicide at his residence yesterday, by shooting himself with a pistol. His wife died very suddenly not long since, and it is supposed that grief at this distressing event led to the fatal and inexcusable act of self-destruction.”

But the orphan knew a truer reason for the act than the flattering motive assigned by the journal. Shocked as he was at the bloody consummation of the murderer's guilt, yet he could not help realizing the position in which it placed him. His heart silently exulted, in the fervor of its joy, and it seemed as if a new existence was dawning upon him. In gladness of soul he seized a pen, and wrote to the farmer's son.

“ My dear Friend :—The time has come when I may joyfully throw off my disguise, and avow myself to the world. I have not time to tell you my whole story, but I will just set down the heads. I was left an orphan and an heiress,—my uncle planned to murder me for the sake of my property,—I escaped, by almost miraculous means, and disguising myself in the garments of your sex, I have been wandering about for more than a year. How well I have kept my secret you can see, when you reflect that even to you I have not revealed it. But my uncle has met a violent death by his own hand, and I am now on my way to the city, to take possession of my inheritance. I trust I shall see you again. And let me indulge the hope that the friendship

which you have exhibited towards Charles Forbes, will glow as warmly in your kind heart for

Your orphan-friend, AMELIA SOMERS."

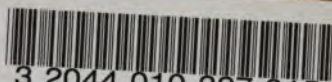
Charles Forbes is therefore no more. And Amelia Somers once more appears in the city of New York, to the perfect astonishment of a large circle of friends and acquaintances. Her story could not be doubted, and she was immediately invested with the possession of all her rights and property. And the beautiful orphan soon became the courted, the flattered, the admired and extolled of her sex, because to all her other graces she added the incomparable charm of being—an *heiress*.

Let us pass over ten years, and glance at a scene of domestic happiness which a miser and money-getter may well envy. Amelia Somers became the wife of Horace Winslow, the farmer's son; for, need we say, that the knowledge of each other's worth soon ripened the first affection of friendship into a stronger attachment and tenderer passion. Three children have already blessed their happy union; and their first-born, a bright lad of six years of age, bears the name of "Charles Forbes Winslow." There they sit, around the cheerful fire. That old lady knitting in the corner, is Mrs. Har- alson. The happy father is trundling the baby on his knee, and the amiable Amelia is instilling wise lessons of maternal wisdom into the minds of her two eldest,—and teaching them, thus young, that virtue, honesty and integrity will always secure contentment, happiness, and peace!





Amelia's Escape from the Tomb. See p. 18.



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